

Book review:**Tide-table of Liam Fox**

Liam Fox. Rising Tides: Facing the Challenges of a New Era. Heron Books, 2013.

Hamlet Isakhanlı

Khazar University, Baku, Azerbaijan

A book normally reflects the world of thoughts of its author. Drop by drop, the author's life—joy and sadness, anger and love, concerns and wishes—soak into the book. In fiction, the identity of the author is in invisible form, not systemic, or clearly visible in one image; instead it may be distributed among several characters. Even though the author's identity is allocated a small space in literature, it plays the role of salt to a meal: just a small amount of it melts into the food, but without it, the food is flavorless. In non-fiction, such as history or philosophy, the author analyzes facts and openly states his/her attitude towards them. These types of works, in contrast to literature, reveal the identity of the author throughout the book. If a work is based on serious research, the author tries to downplay his/her identity, to write with objectivity and maintain the principle of seeing everyone through the lens of equality. He/she avoids polarized views of “them” and “us,” as well as sympathy and antipathy; he/she writes with empathy (or rather, *tries* to do so; after all, authors are also human). However, there is one more type of work or possible author approach. In this case, the author writes to “our own” and tries to explain certain points to them, help them understand what awaits “us” in the future, and to draw lessons and conclusions from historical and current events. *Rising Tides* by Liam Fox can be placed in this last category. The author uses the word “us” in its narrow sense to mean Great Britain and in its broad sense to include Western democracy.

L. Fox, a British Member of Parliament and former Secretary of State for Defense, who has also served in various other government roles, is a man of action with political and administrative experience. His global work activities have also given him the opportunity to meet high-ranking statesmen, converse with them and learn their opinions about interesting issues. The author allocated a great deal of space in his book to these opinions in order to affirm his own claims or to share new ideas.

The book contains seven chapters as well as an introduction and epilogue. The first chapter, about globalization, covers a brief history of democracy; the great dependence on fields such as economics, culture and communications; serious dangers and dark sides of globalization; and those who have begun to challenge the West. The author frequently states throughout the book that the victory of Capitalism over Fascism and especially Communism (USSR) was not only due to economic or military might, but also to “our moral resolve,” “patriotic mindset,” and “ideological strength.” He also makes references to simple truth: “economic strength is the wellspring of political and international influence” (p.23).

L. Fox does not neglect to mention the lies and mistakes of the West. He notes the overconfidence and great naiveté of the West, and he laughs at the attempts to set up Western democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan over a short period of time. It would also be possible to add examples from other countries here, and to note the prevalence of tribal traditions over democracy. However, in his thoughts about China, the author does not discuss the collective identities of China or Asia as a whole, nor does he talk about the possibility of other models besides Western democracy or the idea that they may continue in power for a long time.

The second chapter, entitled “Troubles with Neighbours,” discusses “bad” neighbors, specifically Pakistan and to a certain extent North Korea. In order to show that Pakistan is “the most dangerous country in the world” (p.27), “keeps world leaders awake” (p.26), and is a failed state on many counts, he discusses the Partition of India and its bloody results, gives fascinating analyses and summaries of events in Pakistan’s political history, tries to prove that Pakistan was and is intolerant in matters related to religion and language and that they weaken or even divide the country, and particularly describes the risks of atomic Pakistan. The author cites historians who claim that Muslims have only brought trouble upon India, but fails to mention the efforts of Indian culture benefactors who have tried to bring two cultures together such as Akbar the Great. The Muslim Mughals played a connecting role, while the English were unable to preserve the Hindi-Muslim unity or prevent the country from splitting into two parts in the end.

I completely share the author’s feelings about the Taj Mahal: “I remember seeing it for the first time and being stunned by how much more beautiful and impressive it is in real life than in any picture” (p 33). I had similar thoughts upon seeing the Taj Mahal, deciding that *pictures and descriptions in words cannot express the true beauty of the monument; the beauty as seen in person is indescribable.*

The third chapter, “The Gulf, Islam and the Global Crossroads,” reflects the author’s attitude towards events happening at what is considered the geographic center of Islam. He writes about this area, which was long controlled by the British (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman just became independent in 1971), known for its Sunni and Shia Muslims, rich petroleum resources, and East-West tension.

During the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, “when the United States chose to resupply Israel with arms during the war” (p.91), countries of the Middle East decided to defend their rights, display their strength to a certain degree and announce an oil embargo. The author recalls words of the Shah of Iran to illustrate the results of Colonialism: “You increased the price of wheat you sell us by 300 percent... You buy our crude oil and sell it back to us, refined as petrochemicals, at a hundred times the price you've paid to us...; it's only fair that, from now on, you should pay more for oil. Let's say ten times more” (p.91). Then he illustrates pure Western bias: “Certain European countries and Japan tried to distance themselves from American policy in the Middle East in a *generally crass and undignified attempt* (emphasis mine- H.I.) to avoid the worst of the oil embargo” (p.92). He implies that Western countries should serve the Western solidarity headed by the USA rather than their own interests. Later the author confesses: “The Japanese [had an] enormous dependence on Gulf oil...” (p.93).

In discussing how Britain stirred up Arab nationalism to weaken the Ottoman Empire as well as strengthen Islamism, the gradual decline of Arab nationalism, and the Arab-Israeli Wars, the author focuses on Iran as a point of interest. He gives a summary of Iranian history, of which the section on the 20th century is especially interesting.

Although he doesn’t mention some interesting historical events (such as the Azerbaijani crisis of 1945-46), he carefully covers the two confrontations of government of the Shah versus religion and Mosaddegh versus the West as well as the topic of Khomeini and Iran’s Islamic Revolution on a level that wins his readers and makes it easy to follow him with pleasure. He touches on the Iran-Iraq War and the indifference of the West—or more precisely, its attempt to punish Iran via the hand (weapon) of another, election controversies, the role of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, the Iranian nuclear programs and Western sanctions. In discussing radical Islam and terrorism, despite the fact that the author quotes statements like “complacent and non-comprehending US administrations” (153), unfortunately, he does not analyze the role of Western policy and double standards in the development and spread of terrorism under the flag of Islam. He does offer examples of Sunni-Shia division and Arab-Iran conflict, but it is my opinion that

his analysis of these matters is insufficient (of course, it would be unfair to expect an author to cover every issue he mentions with the same thoroughness). His claim that the majority of Shia followers live in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Bahrain, Azerbaijan and Pakistan (p. 146) is also inaccurate; we mustn't forget the 8-9 million Shias in Yemen, the 4-5 million in Afghanistan, or the nearly 30 million in India.

At the same time, I would like to note the inappropriateness of statements frequently made about Azerbaijan in the Western media such as "Azerbaijan is a Shia Muslim country." First of all, Azerbaijan is a secular state; second, Islam hardly plays a visible role in the state policies of Azerbaijan; third, Azerbaijan is not a Shia country—it is two-thirds Shia and one-third Sunni; fourth, many Azerbaijanis are not religious and do not engage in religious rituals; and fifth, no one writes as his/her first sentence, for example, "France is a Catholic country" as information of primary importance about France.

The fourth chapter, dedicated to "Terror in Our Time," is one of the most interesting sections of the book. I would like to add to the author's thought that terror "is a crude manifestation of anger": anger gives rise to a sense of revenge, and it is the manifestation of desperation. The author begins his analysis with historical facts demonstrating that terror is a worldwide phenomenon, particularly illustrating its occurrences in Europe. There have been and still are terrorists in Britain, Germany, Spain, Italy, Norway, the USA, and every developed and developing nation. He discusses suicide terrorism, including the events of September 11, 2001 as well as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and their assassinations of parliament members and ministers. Here it would have also been possible to note the Armenian terror acts against Turkish diplomats in 1973-1983.

The fifth chapter, based on trade and economic interests, is a bit heavy and dull. The reader is met here with pessimistic views of the European Union's economic and financial problems. He emphasizes the low quality of the state sector in education (probably meaning pre-higher education; p. 241). He analyzes the problem of migration and its economic, political, and cultural identity aspects, recruitment of foreign talent, and welfare recipients' ability to effectively use it. He also discusses the problems of resource-rich countries, the exceptional role of free trade, taxes, and the danger to the state and nation of taking loans (he explains this well). Here the transition from one issue to the next is a bit abrupt.

In the sixth chapter, "Commodities," L. Fox attempts to bring the water problem to the fore. He analyzes the current situation in various locations/ geographies, and he gives a fairly easy-to-follow explanation of the history of wars over water and a

prediction that this problem will grow. He emphasizes the possibility that problems of drinkable water, drought, and famine could sharply increase in China, North Africa, Saudi Arabia (this is interesting), the Pakistan-India-Bangladesh triangle, and some other regions. The author's association of Arab Spring to the water problem in immediate hindsight, as well as to issues of internal commodities, gives the impression of being somewhat contrived.

In the seventh and last chapter, "A Different World," the author tries to combine many different problems together including complicated historical events, such as the attempts of certain nations to determine their destinies after World War I, risky mapmaking with artificially determined borders, Western concerns and even irritation of the West (in a pure pro-Western view) over the strengthening of China, Sunni-Shia tensions in the Muslim world, terror, the ineffectiveness of international institutions (he considers NATO to be the most important), and the conclusion that we need to learn how to act freely on our own. The epilogue is another brief tour of issues that the author is interested in. He closes the book with an optimistic answer to the question "Will we sink or swim in these global rising tides?" (372).

Overall, the book is interesting, and offers useful insights into western diplomats' attitudes towards issues of global concern. Although Fox is an experienced diplomat, he is an inexperienced writer; this is his first book. For this reason, the book has certain shortcomings, which I have shown above. There are also some technical issues. The sources of citations are not precisely shown; in many cases, references are incomplete (for example, "The Economist", 2009). The book does not have an index.

This book was translated into Azerbaijani. (Liam Foks. *Şahə qalxan dalğalar. Yeni ərənin problemləri ilə üz-üzə*. Bakı, TEAS Press, 2014.) Thanks to the project manager, editors and translators! Overall, the translation was successful. However, there are several shortcomings in the translated text. The translations of some expressions are not semantic; they are too literal—their long and convoluted sentence structures get in the way of clearly understanding the text. Certain terminology also proved hard to translate. Let us look at a few examples. The word "tangent" was translated as "tangens," that is as the trigonometric function, although the correct meaning for that context is "toxunan" (English p.28/ Azerbaijani p.40). In another example, "partisan" should not be translated "partizan" (which in Azerbaijani has a narrow meaning), but rather with another word that expresses a biased approach (English p.55/ Azerbaijani p.66). Certain idioms were translated unnaturally, for example "the ostrich with its head in the sand" (English p.10/Azerbaijani p.22) should have been translated with the well-

known expression “dəvə başını pambığa soxub” (“the camel stuck its head in cotton.”) There were no ostriches in this region, but a similar idea came to be expressed with camels. Likewise, “the tables turned” could have been expressed in Azerbaijani as “hər şey alt-üst oldu” (“everything was turned upside-down”) or “astar üzə çıxdı” (“the lining was revealed”) (English p.61/Azerbaijani p.72). The expression “access to knowledge” (English p.365/ Azerbaijani p. 369) was translated “biliyə çıxışı olan” but should have been phrased “biliyinə əl çatan olduğu.”

Finally, I would note one feature not only in this book but common to many books translated into Azerbaijani from Western languages. Proper nouns written in a Latin alphabet should be kept in their original form as an accepted practice; for example, all European languages maintain the original spellings of Goethe, Poincaré, and Bologna. Otherwise, if each nation transliterates proper names according to its own pronunciation, misunderstandings may occur. Azerbaijani is based on a Latin alphabet, but translators into Azerbaijani often neglect this principle because of the legacy of being a Cyrillic language. Names like Liam Fox, John Major, Tony Blair, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Malcolm Rifkind, and Robert Gates should be kept in their original form (not transliterated, for example, Con Meycor for John Major). In cases of necessity, in the first usage, the transliterated name may be added in parenthesis as a pronunciation guide.

I am confident that “Rising Tides” will be useful to its readers. I thank its respected author, Liam Fox, and wish him further successful writing experiences. I thank everyone who was involved in translating this work into Azerbaijani.